

Lolonyo History – Who We Are

The inspiration for a Ewe organization in Michigan began in 2006 after Michigan resident Felix Dogbatse attended the Ga Adangbe Homowo festival. Thoroughly impressed, Felix left the event longing for a similar organization to showcase Ewe traditions in Michigan. He approached Mr. Emmanuel Addo, then president of the Ghana Association of Michigan and inquired about other Ewes living in the Metro Detroit area. Following Mr. Addo's recommendation, Felix approached Dr Vincent Mensah and Ama Gains about forming a Ewe organization. Mr. Felix Dogbatse, Dr Mensah and Ama Gains met together in 2006 for the first time in Novi at Dr. Mensah's residence to discuss how to raise an organization to bring Ewes in Michigan together.

Dr. Mensah, a well-established Michigan resident, suggested potential members in Detroit, Lansing, and Canada. Felix reach out to them and his heartfelt appeals successfully engaged 12 members in attendance for their second meeting a month later in Novi. It was Dr. Mensah who enlisted Mr. Daniel Mensah from Canada and Eli Norgbey from Lansing and by word of mouth, the organization continued to expand.

The first Chairman of the organization was Felix Dogbatse who took on the position temporarily until an election was held later in 2007. Dr. Vincent Mensah was elected as Chair, Agbeko Agbeniga as secretary and Vincentia Jones the assistant secretary. Many suggestions were made regarding naming the organization, but Lolonyo was selected by popular demand. On March 14, 2008, Lolonyo Habobo of North America was registered in the state of Michigan as a non-profit entity for advancing the moral, cultural, literary and artistic heritage of the West African Ewe community in North America. The introduction of dues after registration necessitated the election of Vicky Atayi as the first treasurer of the organization.

In the first few years of inception, members enjoyed a period of euphoric growth in supporting family events, social gatherings, and the first picnic in 2008 in Detroit. Under the original leadership, the organization grew to between 30 and 40 members with a focus on developing a constitution to guide its governance. Though the membership was initially attracted by the solidarity of socializing with fellow Ewes, there was a pressing need to support members during life events and milestones such a family bereavements and celebrations.

In 2009 Lolonyo held its second election. David Barkah, was elected Secretary, Vicky Atayi was re-elected treasurer, but the chairman position remained vacant. Mr. Robert Tette was approached to act as the interim chairman of the organization. The first few years under the new leadership's tenure, Lolonyo went through a season of down-sizing as core members relocated. Volunteer fatigue began to set-in as fewer members were relied upon to support organizational functions. At its lowest, there were 14 members (Felix & Charity Dogbatse, Elizabeth Beckford, Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Mensah of Canada, Mathieu and Jacqueline Fabgedji, David and Phidelia Barkah, Victor Servornu, Eli and Faustina Norgbey) from Lansing, Canada and Detroit. It became necessary to reconstitute the organization to make it more equitable for members to contribute meaningfully to family events.

Fueled by the core group of members, Lolonyo experienced a renaissance in growth with the introduction a website, family and friends picnics, and stronger member support. In 2013 members amended the constitution to include adverse and joyous benefits as well as strengthening the framework defining member eligibility.

Within the Ghanaian communities in Michigan, Lolonyo has become well known for their delicious West African dishes and harmonious vocals during member events and social functions. In 2018, the organization acquired 501C Tax Exempt status. This is a milestone that will propel the organization from a modest social club to an entity that could potentially impact communities in Michigan. The banner for the organization continues to be sharing the African Ewe culture through friendship, community and sharing.